Distance Learning Programs and Procedures

Introduction

Adult education programs must strive to accommodate the needs of the individual student rather than the student "accommodate the needs of the program." A variety of educational opportunities must be afforded adult learners to meet their needs; and at the same time, allow for programs to maintain integrity and rigor. In as much as adult education learners find it difficult to "arrange" their time to participate in rigorous "site specific" adult education program distance learning may be an educational delivery option.

Purpose

The purpose of distance learning is to provide programs with an alternative educational instruction delivery system to increase program intensity, extend educational offerings for adult learners who, for a variety of reasons, are unable or unwilling to attend or participate in traditional adult education programs.

Additionally, distance learning can be seen as a method of enticing individuals to participate in an adult education program that otherwise may choose not to participate.

Instructional opportunities for the student participating in distance learning must be parallel to curriculum and instruction offered in a classroom-based setting.

The primary instruction of a "traditional" adult education program occurs in the classroom. Distance learning is *not* considered as a supplement to the classroom-based approach to teaching.

When Should a Distance Learning Approach be an Instructional Option:

- A student may be considered for distance learning when separated by geography, time or both <u>for the majority</u> of the instructional period.

- Programs with typically less then twelve enrollees attending a "traditional" adult education program on a *consistent* basis are encouraged to consider a distance learning delivery of adult education curriculum.

Or

- Programs with more than twenty-five students attending AHSC 2 classes on a regular basis may consider distance learning as an alternative services approach that might meet the needs of the learner that could/wants to move quicker than the traditional class structure allows.

Program Considerations in Using Distance Learning:

- When considering distance learning as a delivery option programs need to remember that outcomes from this approach may reduce total program outcomes. Outcomes (contact hours, level gains and credits) may be limited due to the students not receiving the same level of program staff monitoring that typically is associated with a learning center approach to instruction.

- Distance learning is not a panacea for all students.

- Distance learning requires the student to be an independent, self-directed, motivated learner who does not require a large amount of teacher direction or interaction.

- A variety of instructional materials meeting the student's needs must be considered in meeting the student's needs including: print, audio recordings, videotape, computer software, web-based program or other online technology

Programming Approaches:

1. Supported Distance Learning
The distance learning student's <u>must spend</u> 85% of their instructional time "at a distance".

- The teacher assigns work; and establishes a schedule for assignment submissions and feedback.

- The student is required to complete six hours of work weekly with the teacher providing 30 minutes of weekly feedback to the student.

- The student completes and returns all assignments electronically or through the U.S. mail (institutional in the case of corrections education).

- At the completion of an instructional unit the student meets at a central program location to complete appropriate unit culminating exams that must be proctored by an adult educator.

2.   Blended Distance Learning
This approach combines distance education with face-to-face instruction.
However 85% of the student's participation <u>must be</u> "at a distance".

- Primary instruction takes place at a distance.

- The student is expected to complete an academic assignment packet every two weeks.

- The student is required to participate in face-to-face teacher/student instruction for 30 minutes weekly.

- As the teacher prepares instructional materials consideration should be given to the fact that one instructional hour spent in a traditional lecture type of class is equal to twelve hours that would be expected of a student to complete the same type of assignment outcomes using this approach.

- Face-to-face interaction between the student and teacher may also be provided, as additional support for the student, in a tutoring lab on a drop-in-as-needed basis. The focus of the additional face-to-face drop-in interaction is to provide time for the student to receive clarification of difficult assignments.

Instructional Presentation Models:
In both distance learning approaches three models of presentation may be considered as a proxy for <u>contact hours</u> of instruction.

1.   Teacher Verification Model
- Program establishes a standard for assignment completion = to the minimum amount of time a student would need to spend to complete a particular unit of instruction given that typical classroom instruction is 40 hours (lecture and assignments) = a .25 unit of credit.
- Teacher certifies assignments are completed.
- Academic outcomes are based on "content completed not quality of completion".
  Example: GED Connections – completing 75% of questions takes about 30 hours to complete.
- Mastery of course material is based on successful completion of unit exams and or unit portfolios.

2. Learner Mastery Model
- Student demonstrates unit mastery by testing.
- "Panel of experts" sets a formula to translate instruction into contact hours.
- When the student "feels they have mastered the material" mastery is demonstrated through an instructional unit test.
  Example: If the student earns 70% accuracy on questions per a unit of instruction the "panel of experts" would equate the score to a certain number of contact hours. Thus 70% on a Crossroads Café unit may equal 10 contact hours; whereas 70% on an English for All unit may only equal 6 hours.
- Students "clepping" from a course of instruction equals 50% of the instructional contact hours that the student would have generated if the student had actually completed the course in a "traditional adult education center" approach to instruction.

3. Clock Time Model
- Curriculum presented online contains a "tutor" tracking time on task.
- Actual # of minutes = actual minutes/hours of contact hours.
- The online curriculum must have a pre-set inactivity log-out function built into the program. Whereby, when the student stops working for more than a certain number of minutes the system logs them out. The time tracking feature of the program ensures time data collected reflects student effort.
- Example: Plato, Skills Tutor, NovaNet or A+

Program Responsibilities:

Regardless of the approach (es) that a program chooses to offer it is expected that state policies are followed including:

- Distance learning students are those who cannot, or choose to not participate in a "traditionally adult education center" approach program. Therefore, programs offering distance learning as a viable instructional approach to adult education must afford program orientation and "class meeting times" at times other then the "traditional" program. This may include meeting on Saturdays, at the local library in the evenings, at a local church, place of business, cell blocks, lock-down units etc.

- The selection of teachers to provide distance learning is critical to the program's success. Teachers must be flexible, innovative and creative. Dealing with the distance learner presents challenges different from a traditional classroom; thus it is essential that a distance education teacher work with students in a "learner-

centered" approach to teaching. A strong sense of curriculum and being technologically adept is critical to the student and program success.

- Programs must establish day-to-day policies including:
  Program standards – including: "what the program will look like", organizational change, the work schedule of the teaching staff, data collection
  Orientation – content of distance education orientation including study skills and organizational skills
  Outcomes - how, when, where student will complete curriculum mastery assessments
  Communication standards - how teacher and student will communicate: Email, institutional mail, telephone, drop-in to the office in addition to the frequency of the communication
  Daily Operations - hours, virtual office hours, etc.
  Tuition and fees - what is to be charged for material rentals etc. Note: all collected fees and/or tuition must be reported to the program's business administrator per Fiscal Compliance Policy for reporting to the Office of Vocation and Adult Education.
  On-going equipment maintenance – establishing procedures to ensure that Web-based programs and software are in working order 24/7.

- Distance learning students must be enrollees having completed 12 contact hours that include a full assessment, EFL, and the completion of an SEOP, defining short and/or long term goal(s).

- Distance learning students, must have a full TABE assessment (including Locator Test) demonstrating a reading scale score performance level of ABE 3 or higher.

- As part of the initial 12 hours distance learning students are required to participate in an orientation specific to distance education that includes the completion of study skills and organizational skills modules as well as an orientation to the curriculum and program expectations. Additionally, the process for assigning work, setting course completion timelines and establishing expectations regarding teacher feedback are to be included as part of the orientation meeting. The hours spent participating in the orientation would be considered non-instructional contact hours.

- At a minimum 85% of the distance learning student's instructional contact hours must be at a distance. If this is not the case then the student is considered a "traditional classroom adult education student" rather than a distance education student. However, if the student is in need of academic classroom "study lab" support as part of the Blended Distance Learning program approach then latitude may be given allowing the program to still "count" the student as a distance education.

- Non-instructional contact hours may also include time spent in telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, between the staff and student. The student's identity must be verifiable through whatever method of interaction the program selects.

- Instructional contact hours for the distance learning student include time spent using technology through the clock-time model or time spent in courses specifically defined by the USOE Distance learning Committee as distance learning curriculum through either the learner mastery model or the teacher verification model.

- Distance learning students may not choose to take a combination of distance education classes and traditional adult education classes simultaneously. Rather, they must choose one or the other. However, the student may choose to enter and exit between the two instructional approaches at the local program's discretion.

NOTE: a student's instructional contact hours must be entered into UTopia. UTopia will "evaluate the student" at the end of the program year to determine if 85% of the student's instructional time was spent as a distance learner or a "traditional learning center" student. Depending on where the 85% percent of the student's attendance occurred UTopia will determine for NRS reports how the student outcomes will be reported – distance learning or "traditional learning center" student.

- Program staff must "meet with the distance learning student" at least weekly in person, via phone or email contact. The purpose of the meeting is to answer questions, encourage students, redirect students' program expectations, etc.

- Distance learning students must complete course unit competency tests at the local adult education center or a mutually agreed upon location in the presence of an adult education instructor.

- Distance learning students like "traditional" adult education students may participate in a post-test after accruing 60 instructional contact hours or later as deemed necessary in order to determine student and program possible level gains. Regardless whether or not the student participates in a "traditional" adult education or a distance learning program all pre- and post-test assessments must be conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator following standardized assessment procedures.

Determining Program Outcomes:

All state adult education outcome parameters will be followed in determining the effectiveness of successful distance learning outcomes.

- Level gains for a distance learning student are determined in the same manner as a "traditional" adult education student – through post-testing.

- Academic assessments are to be completed face-to-face.

- Student core goal outcomes will be measured following the standards established by the USOE for core goal outcome follow-ups. Successes will be determined by the completion of follow-up surveys or by data matching if the student provides the program with a social security number for data matching purposes.

Distance learning "Start-up" Requirements:

In order for a program to initiate and continue with a distance learning approach the following program standards must be included in addition to the narrative section of the program's state grant application.

Local Program Standards:
The following components, must described in detail and submitted to the USOE for review and approval as part of the grant application prior to the implementation of a distance learning program. Note: each distance learning student must receive the same written explanation of the program's distance learning expectations.

- A detailed description of the distance learning program orientation/intake process detailing the following:
  Participation in distance learning requires the student to complete specific learning modules on study skills and organizational skills. Include a description of the materials and course outline that will be used for the study skills and organizational skills modules. Note: The hours spent participating in the orientation would be considered non-instructional contact hours.

- A copy of the orientation materials that will be disseminated to the distance learning student describing the program standards, expectations and rules associated with participation in distance learning. The following must be included:
  - Timeframe for unit/course completion
  - How assignments will be given (a unit at a time, a packet at a time etc.)
  - How assignments will be submitted – electronically, in person

- How and when assignment feedback will be delivered to the student
- Expectations for when the distance education teacher will respond to student inquiries
- Frequency of teacher/student contact (i.e. one or two times weekly) to keep the student engaged and motivated to continue moving forward
- Parameters as to when the distance education program will cease/terminate due to lack of student activity
- Description of how the student will be able to access a telephone "help line" (where students may call and leave a message that a teacher responds to on a daily basis)

- A description of the curricula that will be used in providing distance learning.

- The instructional presentation model and the formula used to develop proxy contact hours for each type of curriculum utilized.

- If the program chooses a clock time model the program must be identified and approved by the state.

- If a program chooses to use a combination of models (teacher verification model, learner mastery model) then the proxy contact hours developed for completing activities for each type of curriculum used (teacher verification model) or the proxy hours developed for the completion of the "units of materials" that comprise the curriculum when using the learner mastery model must be identified and specifically defined.